

**Wheaton Redevelopment Advisory Committee**  
**Meeting Summary - Amended and Approved**  
**July 20, 2011**

**Members Present:** Greg Baker, Melissa Brown, Maureen Carrington, Eleanor Duckett, Regina Dull, Jonathan Fink, Larysa Kurylas, Sara Lappano, Zoe Lefkowitz, Diane Lynne, Leslie McDermott, Tom Martin, Susan Petersen, Erin Roberts

**Members Absent:** Manny Hidalgo, Chelsea Johnson, Chris Lindsay, James Mensah, Patrick Naehu, Dave Taghipour

**Guests:** Councilmember Marc Elrich; Roylene Roberts, Acting Director of Mid County Regional Services Center; Luis Estrada of Montgomery County Planning Dept.; Vince Burke of B.F Saul Co.; John Jenkins, individual; Louis Choporis, individual; Robert Caggiano, individual; Dan Shevieko of Kensington Heights Civic Association; Judy Higgins and Virginia Sheard of Kensington View Civic Association; Marian Fryer of Wheaton Urban District Advisory Committee; and Taylor Brown of Wheaton Patch.

**Call to Order:** The meeting convened at 7:05 p.m.

- Greg Baker, Chair welcomed Councilmember Marc Elrich and introduced Roylene Roberts, Division Chief of Neighborhood Revitalization for the Dept. of Housing and Community Affairs as the Acting Director of the Mid-County Regional Services Center.
- Mr. Klein advised that a new Director was likely to be appointed in September and would then be introduced to WRAC

**Approval of April, May and June Meeting Summaries** – A motion to approve the meeting summaries from April 20, 2011, May 18, 2011 and June 15, 2011 WRAC meetings was made Ms. Carrington and seconded by Mr. Fink. The motion was approved unanimously.

**Redevelopment Report:** Mr. Klein Reported the following:

- Greg Baker, chair testified on behalf of WRAC at the County Council's Public Hearing. The testimony reiterated WRAC's July 15 letter to Council President Valerie Ervin. A copy of the letter is in the information packet for this meeting.
- There were 16 persons testifying at the Public Hearing. Overall, public comment supported the Draft Sector Plan. Concerns that were voiced related zoning in transitional neighborhoods, the environment and water quality, and accessory apartments
- Planning Staff will be presenting the Design Guidelines for Wheaton to the Planning Board on July 21. The Guidelines are not much more detailed than when presented at the last meeting. Redevelopment staff will update WRAC on the Planning Board's recommendations for the Design Guidelines.
- Montgomery Plans, co-produced by Montgomery County Cable and M-NCPPC will feature a segment on the role of small business in Wheaton Sector Plan.

- The County has determined that it needs more information in order to better allocate costs between the parties in the Public-Private Partnership effort with B.F. Saul. Additional engineering (geotech) is being conducted. The project continues to progress made as multiple aspects of the project are being done in parallel,
- Preparations have begun for the Wheaton Redevelopment Capital Improvements Program (CIP) budget, which are ultimately forwarded to the County Council for approval. The CIP is prepared every 2 years countywide, and identifies and prioritizes capital improvements planned for the next 6 years.
- The Dept. of General Services has engaged Loiderman Soltesz and Associates to assess the feasibility of connecting Price and Ennalls Avenues. This connection would improve downtown Wheaton's road grid. At issue is whether the slopes of the proposed road would be acceptable for a public roadway. So far, feedback from the County's Department of Transportation Studies have indicated that this is likely.
- The County Council continues to consider a proposed Zoning Text Amendment for the CR Zone.
- Subsequent to CIP budget preparations, David Dise, Director of the Department of General Services will attend the September WRAC meeting to follow up on previous WRAC discussions concerning the design of the proposed Wheaton Library/Recreation Center.
- Recommendations for new appointees to WRAC have been forwarded to the County Executive for disposition.
- Westfield has advised that the proposed Costco has already improved interest in the Mall, attracting Sears Outlet, Panera Bread, Elevation Burger, and H&M. The Special Exception on Costco's Gas Station has been postponed indefinitely at the request of the applicant

**Bus Rapid Transit (BRT)** Councilmember Mark Elrich, who has devoted a significant amount of time to analysis of public transportation issues in the County, discussed the following:

- The car is the premier choice of transportation in our country, but infrastructure hasn't kept pace with development. The high cost of infrastructure, particularly in a challenging economy, makes improved public transit systems a reasonable alternative
- Due to the primacy of the auto in America, much of the public holds a negative view of bus transit systems. Bus riders are viewed as "2<sup>nd</sup> class citizens with bus systems are perceived as being designed to serve "non-choice" riders. In Montgomery County scheduling and frequency of bus lines is not good
- For Bus/public transit to succeed it has to become the choice alternative to driving one's own car.
- The Councilmember's interest in public transit was prompted by the County's transportation policy - particularly the measure used for assessing acceptable mobility
- Mr. Elrich believes the County's Growth policy is defective, utilizing transportation tests that are used nowhere else in the state and designed so "you

- can't fail". Next year, the County will replace the test with one that separates auto and public transit users, improving the understanding of road capacity, i.e. – how many people can be moved by car, how many by transit
- This will assist in altering the transit system to provide the appropriate number of seats, frequency and speed.
  - The Washington Council of Governments (WCOG) predicts CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in DC area will, by 2030, increase by 48 % if there are no changes in transit conditions.
  - Mr. Elrich asked WCOGS disaggregate Montgomery County from DC metro areas to try to determine how many people we need to get out of cars to lower CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. By reducing vehicle miles traveled (VMT) by 8.3% of 2030 projections the governments 2002 emissions standards could be achieved.
  - In Montgomery County there is no road grid to adequately provide alternate transportation routes for traffic.
  - Part of a possible solution to reduce vehicle use might be to reprice parking in urban areas or limit the amount of parking and commit dollars that would be used for parking to transit. Boston is an example of how it can work.
  - Infrastructure and alternative forms of public transit are too costly. Subways cost \$300 million per mile. Montgomery County would need a 120 miles. Light rail will cost \$100 million per mile. Bus Rapid transit become the most cost effective method – dedicated trackways for BRT would cost about \$1.2 million per mile. Some areas, such as Georgia Ave. or Rockville Pike will cost more
  - The keys to successful BRT:
    - frequently running linear routes
    - off board fare collection, heavily reliant on IT -e.g. Smartcards and readers/scanners.
    - aesthetically pleasing design
    - stations not bus stops
    - access at grade
  - BRT routes can be greener, with more pervious surfaces
  - The current Ride-On system would be completely reconfigured, so that it becomes a feeder system from neighborhoods to BRT access
  - Boston, Eugene (Oregon) and Los Angeles are cities where BRT is employed. The Eugene system cost approximately \$6 million per mile
  - Current Status of BRT in Montgomery County:
    - Engineering firm Parsons, Brinkerhoff has done a study initially proposing a 180-mile system now reduced to 150 miles
    - 16 of the proposed route met Fed standards for funding, but there are no Fed dollars available. The County is not planning to use Fed dollars so there will be no delays.
  - Committee addressing BRT will dictate materials and routes, financing plan
  - Some proposed routes:
    - Rte 28 from ICC to Rockville
    - Randolph from Georgia to Rte 29 ending at DC line
    - Route 29 from Burtonsville to Silver Spring
    - New Hampshire Ave. from OCC to Ft. Totten
    - Express bus service on ICC to BWI

- Purple Line - Langley Park to Wheaton
- Viers Mill Rd. between Wheaton to Rockville
- Georgia Ave between Olney and Wheaton
- Route 355 from Bethesda – to Germantown campus of Montgomery College
- Proposed BRT represents a “rare moment”: Environmentalists, Developers, Civic Community all on same page for a transit project.
- Wheaton is ground zero with 3 routes coming in. From Wheaton one should be able to go anywhere – UMD, Rockville, DC, BRAC. This should enhance its appeal.
- Ideas for funding:
  - Transportation Infrastructure Tax on the roughly \$24 Billion of commercial real estate lining proposed routes. Fairfax, Arlington are already doing something like this.
  - Transportation/Special Taxing District - capture all commercial property within ½ mile of proposed routes or take monies dedicated to roads under Impact Taxes and use for BRT.
- Priority on route construction: Veirs Mill and Georgia are going into engineering.

**Perspective on Wheaton Redevelopment:** Councilmember Elrich shared the following:

- He has concerns with C-R Zoning, and believes it is a “one size fits all approach”. If building under optional method, a developer has to meet 100% of amenity requirements rather than being scaled to project size.
- Wheaton needs office development, but C-R doesn’t dictate that. If Zoned C-R a developer can choose to build residential rather than commercial.
- C-R Zone doesn’t address affordable housing adequately. an analysis of job creation for Science City showed that 11,000 of 40,000 jobs will have incomes of 32K or less and only 720 Moderately-Priced Dwelling Units are planned.
- Sensitive to issues of transitional neighborhoods and density
- Opposed to designating this area as receiving areas for accessory apartments when Bethesda, Potomac are not. It represents locational inequality
- Special Exception process needs to be ‘cheap & easy’
- County doesn’t enforce existing housing code, which is part of the problem.
- The Councilman is willing to meet with small groups to discuss development.

**Term Expiration:** Mr. Klein acknowledged WRAC members Diane Lynne, Maureen Carrington, Manny Hidalgo, and Greg Baker, whose terms of service on WRAC are expiring. Mr. Klein presented them with Certificates of Appreciation from the County Executive. Mr. Baker also received a plaque in appreciation of his service as Chair of WRAC.

**Sector Plan:** Testimony to Council is provided in meeting packet. Greg Baker, Chair, testified–spoken and Written from WRAC

**Design Guidelines** – Ms. Petersen advised that the Guidelines are available on the Planning board website. The Project Review Subcommittee will review and prepare comment for Planning staff in a joint meeting with Planning & Visioning on July 28.

**Wheaton Library/Rec. Center** – Committee members were open to a suggestion by Ms. Kurylas, that Jon Lourie, an architect who served on the Silver Spring Redevelopment Steering Committee, be invited to the next WRAC meeting to share his perspectives on the design competition that was held for the Wheaton Civic Center. This might further inform ongoing WRAC discussions on the possibility of a design competition for the Wheaton Library/Rec Center. The Committee concluded that David Dise should be invited to the meeting as well to further elaborate on the possibility of such a competition.

**Nominations for new WRAC officers** – Mr. Baker advised that the committee needed to identify and nominate candidates for Chair and Vice-Chair of WRAC for FY 2012. Melissa Brown nominated Jonathan Fink for Chair and Tom Martin for Vice Chair. Susan Petersen nominated Larysa Kurylas for Vice Chair. Nominations will be open through the September meeting and election of officers will occur at the October WRAC meeting.

### **Subcommittee Reports**

- Planning & Visioning - Did not meet in July. Subcommittee Chair Tom Martin proposed merging the committee with the Project Review subcommittee as the bulk of work on the Sector Plan was completed. The Chair recognized Mr. Martin for his work as Subcommittee chair.
- Project Review – Ms Petersen reiterated her previous comments concerning the July 28 subcommittee meeting to review the Design Guidelines.
- Economic Development – Mr. Fink advised that no meeting was held in July due to the July 4 holiday. The committee is following up with Steve Silverman as to how the County will address small business concerns as they relate to the B.F. Saul project. The committee is also finalizing the business and residential surveys for distribution. The next meeting will be the 1<sup>st</sup> Tuesday in September.

**Committee member Resignation** – Mr., Klein announced that Fran Ware, who served as an ex officio member of WRAC has resigned, as she had been reassigned as the Manager of the Silver Spring Library. Redevelopment staff will reach out to new manager of the Wheaton Library to determine her interest in serving on WRAC.

**Green Wheaton** – Mr. Klein reported on the organizations activities advising it held a Happy Hour at the Royal Mile Pub on July 14 to celebrate its restructuring as a 501 ( c )3. Green Wheaton is no longer affiliated with WRAC or WUDAC. Green Wheaton is currently planning for Community Service Day on 10/19.

**Adjournment:** The meeting adjourned at 8:46 p.m.